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THE POTOROO TRUFFLE (*POTOROMYCES LOCULATUS*)

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The fungus-feeding habit of small and not-so-small mammals has long fascinated naturalists. Only recently and on the local scene has the ecological significance of this habit been worked out, for the Tammar and the Bettong, by Dr. Per Christiansen. (See *Forests Department Bulletin* No. 89, in press). There have been parallel discoveries in North America by Dr. Jim Trappe. The arts of the human truffle hunter, often aided by dog or pig, have been described many times.

That these fungi have a significance for animals quite apart from man has long been indicated by the name Hart or Stag Truffle, in Latin *Elaphomyces cervinus* (in Latin deer is *cervinus*, in Greek *elaphos*). An excellent illustration of this fungus is Figure 119 in Gäumann and Dodge's *Comparative Morphology of the Fungi* (1928). A later version of this book, published in 1952, says, 'The similarity in appearance of the fructifications of *Elaphomyces cervinus* to those of the true truffles, except in size, is the basis of their common name, stag truffle'. But nearer the truth are the words of the old pharmacopoeia quoted (coyly, in Latin) by Ramsbottom on page 272 of his *Mushrooms and Toadstools: 'Fungus cervinus'*. '*Tubera cervina*' and similar names so-called because they are found in places where the deer exercise their libido. The deer eat the truffles and so, by inexorable Mediaeval logic, they must be of use to man in the exercise of *his* libido.

Ferdinand von Mueller was aware of this connection with animals when he roamed the Western Australian forests a century ago, and when he was presented with the fragments of an underground fungus with a strong aromatic/garlic odour, recognised it for what it was: an Australian equivalent of the Stag Truffle. He sent some with a covering letter to his correspondent Mordcaai Cubbit Cooke. Cooke was a man who could turn into exquisite paintings the terse Latin descriptions of fungi that he had not even seen and who wrote the first and only fungus flora of a continent he had not even visited—Australia. The letter lies with the specimens in the herbarium of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew and is reproduced here exactly as it was written in von Mueller's only slightly imperfect English.

19/9/1881

May I draw your particular attention to the enclosed fung, dear Dr Cooke, which seems to me to constitute a new genus, nearest to *Elaphomyces*. I have divided the few specimens so as to supply you, the Rev. M. J. Berkeley & the Rev. C. Kalkbrenner. The loculation, by which the peripheric sporiferous space is interrupted, seems remarkable, so the large solid central mass which is granular under the microscope. The closely packed spreading MILLIONS of threads, far more delicate than those of the finest spider-webs, are—as you will notice—beset with egg shaped spores in uncountable vastness of number.

The name is derived from Potorous, that given by Desmarest to the Kangaroo Rats (from the aboriginal appellation "Potoroo"), these animals feasting on this fung, scraping it up from its concealment 3 or 4 inches underground. It came from a place near the coast between Point d'Entrecasteaux & Point Nuyts, and was sent me by Mr. Th. Muir, who like all other correspondents of mine I had repeatedly asked to secure any fungus he might meet with.

As *Elaphomyces* indicates a sort of truffle, of which the stags are fond, I hope you will think the allusion I made a happy one.

Of course, I may be quite wrong in this; for I never had time to study fungus methodically, my energies having . . .

The next page of the letter is missing, and could not be found even

after a search in the Archives. But the specimens are annotated in von Mueller's hand as

Potoromyces loculatus, near the entrance of the Gordon River. West. Aust. 1881 Th. Muir.

It is the Gardner River that has its entrance from the sea between Pt. Entrecasteaux and Pt. Nuyts, but it is likely that the specimen did come from the inland Gordon River, which is near to the areas where Thomas Muir collected and farmed.

So we now know that von Mueller was NOT "wrong in this" and his allusion is entirely a happy one. It is rather sad that the rules of botanical nomenclature prevent his name being valid and the current name of the Potoroo Truffle is *Mesophellia glauca* (Cooke & Massce) Reid as published by Dr. D. A. Reid in the *Kew Bulletin*, volume 17, page 306, 1963.

FROM FIELD AND STUDY

A spider feeding on a jewel beetle.—On October 21, 1979, in the company of Mr. S. Wilson, the author was observing insects feeding on *Chamaelancium uncinatum*, some 20 km N of Gingin (31°04'S, 115°47'E). We noticed a moderately sized brown spider feeding on a jewel beetle, *Stigmopera (Castiarina) picta* Laporte and Gory, which it had wrapped in silk. The spider was busily feeding on the tissues between the thorax and abdomen. The spider was collected and later identified by Dr. B. Y. Main as an immature female of an *Araneus* species (Araneidae), possibly *A. heroine*. Little is known about the predators of jewel beetles (Buprestidae). Barker and Inns (*West. Aust. Nat.*, 13, 1976: 147-148) have recorded an asilid fly as a predator of a large jewel beetle in Western Australia. Although it could be assumed that spiders feed on buprestids, there have been no previously published reports verifying this assumption.

—T. J. HAWKESWOOD, Subiaco.

Musk Lorikeets at Troy Park, Swan River—On April 1, 1979, at Troy Park in Alfred Cove I heard an unfamiliar parrot call and looked around for its source in the eucalypts bordering the road. I soon found a group of 8 Twenty-eight Parrots (*Barnardius zonarius*) c. 8 metres from the ground and below them at c. 3 metres two greenish lorikeets with red foreheads, lores and stripe from behind the eye to side of neck.

The latter birds were quite clearly not Purple-crowned Lorikeets (*Glossopsitta porphyrocephala*) with which I am familiar but appeared to be Musk Lorikeets (*Glossopsitta concinna*).

After I had watched them for about 5 minutes they flew down to and entered a hollowed-out branch in the eucalypt, the hollow being c. 10 cm in diameter.

I again saw them entering and leaving the hollow on April 7 and heard in the hollow what sounded like them on April 8th.

B. Corfe (*West. Aust. Nat.*, 13; 1977: 209) found Musk Lorikeets breeding at Alfred Cove in a Flooded Gum (*Eucalyptus rudis*) in late 1975, so I presume that these are the same birds or direct descendants of them.

—PHILIP GRIFFIN, Western Australian Museum.

Record of the arachnid order Schizomida in Western Australia.—The small, moisture-loving order of arachnids, Schizomida or "micro-whip scorpions" have a scattered distribution in South and Central America, Africa and oriental regions. Occurrence of the group in Australia has long been known but the specimens collected have not to date been described (Main, 1979). Dr. T. E. Woodward collected specimens in rainforest near Brisbane many years ago (pers. comm. 1965). Dr. J. A. L. Watson more recently has collected specimens in the vicinity of Darwin (pers. comm.).